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THE STILL SMALL VOICE

A LECTURE ON THE

NATURE OF THE DIVINE REVELATION
THAT IS TAKING PLACE TO-DAY

BY

DR. PAUL CARUS

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THE STILL SMALL VOICE.

NEVER has there been a time in which the changes that took place in man's religious attitude were more significant than during the last decade, and yet the period of transition is so little marked by any ostentation, or noise, or excitement that the fact itself might easily be overlooked by a superficial observer.

When the Reformation set in we had a vigorous clashing of opinions; public debates were held that kept the world in suspense; œcumenical councils convened; the Diet of the German empire, then the centre of the world, legislated on the religious situation; Papal bulls and imperial decrees were issued; the boldest dissenters were burned at the stake—a method of enforcing uniformity of belief from which even Protestants did not shrink; the opposed parties rushed to arms, and most sanguinary wars were waged, accompanied by famines and epidemics. A period of the most terrible barbarism set in, in which all the powers of Hell seemed to be let loose; cities were demolished, villages burned down, and whole provinces laid waste, until by sheer exhaustion peace was restored.

Think of the millions of human lives sacrificed upon the altar of religious freedom, and yet, even at that price, the Reformation was not too dearly bought; for our present culture with all its blessings, our liberty of conscience, free investigation, scientific progress, and following in its trail invention and prosperity, are the glorious consequences which may all be traced back to the struggle for liberty, to the religious reform begun by Wyckliffe and Huss, culminating in Luther, defended by Gustavus Adolphus, and victoriously maintained after the terrible Thirty Years' War.

It is no accident that the Protestant countries are marching in

the van of civilisation. It is among them, more than in Roman Catholic or Greek Catholic countries, that science has slowly but surely laid the foundation of a higher civilisation built upon the ruins of the past, and here in the United States we feel its blessings more than in any other country.

There is at present another reform going on, which in its intrinsic tendency and main import is nothing but the consequence of Luther's demand for the freedom of the Children of God. Liberty of conscience, as demanded by Luther, includes free investigation; and the quiet reformation that is going on now is due to the influence of science upon religion.

Reactionary historians, however, claim that we are on the high road to ruin. They tell us that the reformers clamored for freedom but established license, and that the final result will be political and religious anarchy. The reformed churches, it is claimed by Roman Catholic critics, (and there is some truth in it,) stand on a slanting platform. Their position is inconsistent. Having cast off the authority of the established Church they are driven by inexorable logic to deny all authority in both religion and government. They called for a free Bible and now they suffer from the cancer of the higher criticism; they granted the liberty of theological investigation, and now one dogma after another is condemned before the tribunal of science. While the Roman Church, built upon the rock of St. Peter, remains the same and shows a strong united front, Protestantism has from time to time to change its position and is divided into as many sects as there are different opinions.

There is a truth in this censure of the Protestant position, yet the question is whether the stability of Roman Catholicism is so very desirable. Are not these changes symptoms of life and indispensable accompaniments of progress?

The change in our religious attitude that is coming on slowly and surely, that is taking place under our very eyes, is of a peculiar kind. It is the power of thought within, which comes as a still small voice, a silent power that brooks no violence, a spiritual movement that is not in need of swords or guns to assert its principles. It is the influence of science upon the minds of the thought-

ful, the honest, the truth-loving, and it comes about by the gradual establishment of a scientific world-conception.

The Reformation of Luther was a moral reformation. It demanded a cleansing of the Church in head and limbs. It swept out the leaven of Roman paganism, with its saint-worship, reverence for relics, hierarchical institutions, indulgence sales and other abuses, and submission to papal authority. The present movement that is transforming our churches is above all an intellectual reform. It is the direct influence of science upon faith, and cleanses the Church of the paganism of dogma. After all it is merely the logical consequence of the recognition of a free science. Its ideal is radical honesty of thought.

The influence of science upon religion is a reformation that (like the kingdom of heaven in the time of Christ, indeed like all spiritual movements) works from within. It is taking place in the hearts of the theologians who teach it to the growing generation of clergymen; it spreads with the spread of science and is imperceptibly purifying Christianity, giving it a higher, broader and deeper interpretation.

There are thousands and millions who are not aware of the change; yet the transformation is most radical and will, when it has become a matter of history, be recognised as such. It affects to some extent even the Roman Catholic Church and the result is that Protestants take more kindly to their old adversary and begin to set aside the old grudges against it.

But, is the influence of science not antagonistic to religion? Is it not destroying the Christian faith? Does it not take away the fond illusions of our dearest hopes? Philosophy offers us nothing but empty abstractions, and higher criticism invades the Bible and destroys its sanctity!

Allow me to protest against the popular phrase, "empty abstraction." Abstractions would be empty if they were meaningless. Mathematical formulæ, for instance Kepler's laws, are abstract but they are empty only to the uneducated who do not know their importance. They are freighted with meaning to those who

understand their universal application and appreciate their significance for a scientific comprehension of the world.

Call the philosopher's definition of God an "abstraction," but do not forget that all abstractions represent realities. No one speaks of gravitation as an "empty abstraction," because we know too well that gravity is real. The same is true of the abstractions of the moral factors that build up our life. If the philosopher defines God as the world-order, or as the sum-total of law, or the unity of law, or specifically as the authority of moral conduct, as that which leads living creatures to develop the ideal of justice and love and good-will, or the *raison d'être* of man's spirituality, viz., that which produces man and leads him higher; we have abstractions which cover facts of experiences and these facts, the spiritual features of existence, the moral factors of life, are not less real than is the gravity of stones.

Even Christ speaks of God in abstract terms as "love" and as "spirit," not as "a loving being" nor as "a spirit," and shall we denounce his definitions as empty abstractions?

The spiritual and moral factors of life, the power that makes for righteousness, are a part of the general world-order, but they are its most significant part which gives character to the rest; and it is most important to remember that all the factors which shape the world are not mere words but living presences.

The scientist formulates the uniformities of the world as a multiplicity of natural laws, but there is unity in variety. All of them constitute one great system, one organic whole. They are the eternal in the transient and the universal in the particular. They positively possess qualities which are attributed to God alone. They are as intrinsically necessary as mathematical truths are rigorous. Therefore they are absolutely true. They are true of any possible kind of existence, and would remain true even if the world were annihilated. They apply not only to nature as it is, but to any possible nature. In other words, they are supernatural or hyperphysical in the literal sense of the word.

The supernatural in nature is not corporeal; it is neither concrete nor individual, but universal and non-material. It is compar-

able to a great personality, but I hesitate to call it a personality because these creative factors in their totality are higher than the highest personality; they are the prototype of all human personality. Man becomes man by acquiring reason, and reason is nothing but the vision of the eternal, a comprehension of the absolute, an appreciation of the universal. If we speak of the supernatural as a personality, we must know that it is not a human personality but a divine personality, and thus the scientific view of God (Nomothemism, as we might call it), which sees in the laws of nature, the eternal thoughts of God, does not declare either a personal or an impersonal God, but a superpersonal God.

Sensual natures need sensual allegories, and mythology is required in the period of the childhood of the race, but maturer minds will take no offence at the more exact methods of scientific conceptions.

Everyone's God-conception is the measure of his own stature. A sensual man, incapable of abstract thought, should have a mythological and anthropomorphic God-conception, otherwise he would look upon God as an empty phrase. A philosophical definition would not impress him as describing a reality; and though his mythological belief would in details be subject to error, he would in the main act rightly, for mythology, though not the truth, can very well serve as a surrogate for the truth and will retain its poetical value even when its fairy-tale character is beginning to be understood.

Our notions of a heaven above the clouds, and a brimstone hell, and many other religious conceptions, have become mythological, but they have not lost their meaning. The curse of sin and the bliss of righteousness remain as real as they ever were, and if there are people who still believe in a brimstone hell, we may be sure that they still stand in need of a sensual imagery. A purer conception would be an empty abstraction to them, for every one's religion ought to keep pace with his mental growth; and as a rule, every one has the religion which he deserves.

The destructive character of science appears to special disadvantage in the field of Bible literature. Our religious traditions,

no longer assured facts of history, are changed into legends and myths. The first chapter of Genesis has been degraded into the mere echo of a pagan cosmology. Samson is the Babylonian Shammash, a Hebrew Hercules, the sun-god on his migration, who performs his twelve labors and loses all strength when his hair, the solar rays, is cut off. The Book of Esther is the myth of Ishtar and Marduk. The stories of Abraham and Lot have become Hebrew folklore, and the very name, "Jehovah," endeared to us through church hymns, has become a philological monstrosity, while the Hebrew "Yahveh," which now takes its place, signifies a tribal deity, which, closely considered, is not very different from the Phœnician Baal and the Moabite Chemosh. The monotheistic conception appears now as the result, not so much of a direct revelation, as of a long historical development. In a word, the inroads which science made from all sides are so formidable that nothing worth speaking of seems to be left.

The uniqueness of the Hebrew revelation too is gone. Moses is now paralleled by Hammurabi, and Isaiah by Zarathushtra, the golden rule was pronounced more than half a millennium before Christ by Confucius, and love of enemies has been preached by Buddha and Lao-Tze. Obviously the uniqueness of our revelation is unique to *us* because it is *ours*. The Egyptians, too, considered themselves the chosen people; so did the Brahmans, so the Chinese, so does every nation on earth in a stage of immaturity. Greek cosmopolitanism is the first symptom of a higher civilisation with broad humanitarian ideals.

Yet, suppose that *our* civilisation should finally conquer all others, (which can be done by absorbing them, by accepting their good features,) the uniqueness of *our* religion would become a universal uniqueness, but it would be developed by the breadth of a genuine catholicity. Man's religious conceptions too are subject to the laws of a survival of the fittest, and in the long run truth alone will prove strong.

The aim of the religious development of mankind is determined by truth, and objectively determined truth is, in a word, called science; but the course of evolution might have run over different

paths. If the prophets of monotheism had not risen among the Jews, or if the monotheistic reformers had not formulated their faith and incorporated it in their redaction of the Hebrew scriptures, monotheism would after all have risen; but it would have come to the front in another place and through some other medium perhaps in Persia, where a very pure conception of the Deity was dawning.

In fact we know that the Persian religion exercised an enormous influence upon the Jews in Babylon, and Mazdaism is as elevating and noble as the prophetic movement in Israel. If Persian monotheism had met with universal acceptance, the place of Moses would have been taken by Zarathushtra and the place of David by Cyrus, the great founder of the Persian empire, whom Isaiah called "the anointed one of the Lord," "the Messiah of Yahveh."

There is no need of ventilating the question whether our religious development would have been better if it had taken a different course, but it is well to know what might have been. If we had received our monotheism from the Persians, our theologians would quote from the Avesta; if we had learned the ethics of "love of enemies" from Buddha, they would study the Dhammapâda and other Pâli scriptures. In either case these other Bibles would have become canonical and held a unique place in our literature, but the great outlines of our religious growth would have remained the same.

Having learned that in several countries the same, or a similar, evolution is taking place according to an intrinsic law of nature, the idea has been proposed that all religion is purely human—and truly it is. All religious evolution is purely human, just as the present movement, the influence of science upon our belief is purely human. Yet in spite of the purely human character of scientific investigation, we find that science itself is possessed of an element that is superhuman.

Science is not a product of man's fancy. Man can neither make nor mar scientific truth. He cannot manufacture it to suit his pleasure. Scientific truths are eternal verities. Man does not invent them; man discovers them. Science is nothing but the tracing of those features of nature which are eternal. It is the dis-

covery of the laws that shape the universe and guide the evolution of the world. Science accordingly is purely human only in its subjective aspect; the objective norm of science and its results are beyond human interference. There is a deep truth in the old doctrine of the God-man, for the ideal of perfect humanity is a theophany—an incarnation of the Deity. The human element of the scientist's labors does not exclude the divinity of science. The truths discovered by science are the eternal laws of being which cannot be made or unmade, changed or altered by any mortal, be he ever so powerful and grand, be he king or emperor or pope.

Verily and truly, science, if it but be genuine science, is a divine revelation, and the spread of a scientific world-conception is the coming of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of God who will guide us into all truth. (John xvii. 13.)

Whenever a scientist discovers a truth, he receives a revelation from on high; whenever he comprehends a law, he deciphers the hieroglyphs of a thought of God; whenever he gains a new insight into the constitution of the world either in its general significance or its special reference to man's duties, he should in reverence take off his shoes, for he is in the presence of God.

Yet while science is divine and applicable to the whole range of life, including the domain of religious belief, while science should not be twisted to suit the purposes of dogmas of an established religion, we must bear in mind the difference between religion and science.

The clergyman is appointed to spread religion; his first duty is his pastoral work; he is sent out as an adviser and counselor to the members of his congregation, to comfort them in affliction, to stablish them in the love of truth and honesty, to strengthen them in temptation, to elevate their minds and consecrate their lives to a higher purpose than transient pleasures. He is not expected to deliver scientific discourses, be it on physics or bacteriology or the Higher Criticism. He should address himself to the heart, not to the head. Even in a scientific age the maxim remains true, *pectus facit theologum*, "it is the heart that makes the clergyman." But the progress of the age demands that the clergyman

should have a scientific training, otherwise he runs the risk that the members of his congregation stand above him and he will in consequence lose his hold on their minds.

A clergyman should be familiar with the scientific method, its exactness and its rigor; he should have imbibed the spirit of science, and it would be well if he had devoted some time to the study of some specialty, mathematics, mechanics, physics, or physiology; but at the same time, while becoming scientific, he should not be changed into a scientist. He should bear in mind the purpose of his profession. He should be a teacher, an adviser, a pastor, a guide through the labyrinth of life.

But if the main burden of pastoral work lies in the moral field, why should we not abandon religion and preach pure morality? In reply I would say that religion as I conceive it is the basis of all morality. Religion implies a world-conception and morality is nothing but the application of a man's belief as to his destiny in life to practical problems; for religion is conviction, specifically that conviction which refers to the entirety of existence. Conviction is a power which dominates the will. Conviction is the motive, which determines the action of man; conviction is that which gives character to his personality. There is no such thing as non-religious ethics.

Religion consists in sentiment, but the nature of sentiment depends upon the idea by which it is inspired. There is no sentiment which is nothing but sentiment; all real sentiment possesses definite contents. Sentiments are directed toward an aim and the contents of religious sentiments are formulated in doctrines. Doctrines naturally constitute the backbone of religion and doctrines may either be right or wrong. They may be mere assumptions (commonly called dogmas) based on insufficient knowledge, or they may be sound truths which can stand the test of science and will pass through the furnace of critique unscathed.

In former ages belief (in the sense of insufficient knowledge) has been extolled but we know now that we can have a faith well founded,—a faith the application of which in the domain of conduct can be justified by inquiry and by experience.

Agnosticism is an untenable position which, though invented to stifle religion, chokes science. If agnosticism were true, science would have no right to interfere with blind belief, but superstition would be entitled to the same respect as any pure and noble faith. Agnosticism pretends to take an advanced position, but it is as reactionary as it is wrong. It is not true that the problems of God, his existence or non-existence, his nature and his dispensation, of the soul and immortality, of the destiny and duty of man, etc., lie outside the pale of investigation. We can in all these questions as much as in mathematics, or physics, or chemistry, find out the truth and distinguish between right and wrong, between orthodoxy and error, between good and evil. Agnosticism falls like a blight on the spirit of enquiry; it makes one blasé and disheartens the thinker, the inventor, the student. What our young men need is belief in science, not this pernicious and unjustifiable awe of nescience.¹

But would not science thus reintroduce the antiquated horrors of dogmatic orthodoxy? Scarcely! For the new orthodoxy of provable truth will not brook violence and will be a blessing to all those who love clearness and definiteness.

The old venerable word "orthodoxy" has been greatly misused in past ages, and has thus rightly acquired a savor of narrowness. Nevertheless, the ideal of seeking and having the right doctrine is not only legitimate but indispensable and should not be abandoned.

Only let us substitute the orthodoxy of sound doctrine for the old ideal of an orthodoxy of dogma.²

The old orthodoxy clung to certain dogmas established by tradition and sanctioned by œcumenical councils. Dogmas, as a rule, are symbols, i. e., formulations of the faith in allegorical language; they are collected in the symbolical books. The upholders of ancient orthodoxy were narrow-minded and scorned every one who used other allegories or other rituals, even if the meaning was the

¹ For a discussion of Agnosticism see the author's pamphlet *Kant and Spencer*.

² See the author's article "The New Orthodoxy" in *The Monist*, Vol. VI., No. 1, pp. 91-98, republished in *The Dawn of a New Religious Era*, pp. 21-30. Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co.

same. The new orthodoxy would not be a stickler for words and similies but would insist on essentials.

You notice that I make a difference between dogma and doctrine, between belief and faith: I discard the former, I retain the latter; and at the same time I cling to the old ideals of catholicity and orthodoxy. But I insist that our catholicity be catholic, not Roman, or Greek, or Anglican; but as universal as is science. I insist that orthodoxy be genuine rightness of opinion, not an orthodoxy of dogma, of belief based upon insufficient knowledge, but an orthodoxy of doctrine, of objectively provable truths.

The essentials of a religion may be classified under the heads of God, Soul, and World as follows:

First, there must be a standard of right and wrong, which can be discovered by experience and finds in man's conscience an instinctive expression. The ultimate authority of conduct is commonly called "God."

Secondly, if religion shall regulate man's conduct, he must be shown that he is responsible for his actions and their consequences. He has the choice between good and evil, and the very idea that he is held responsible will become an important factor in his decision. Hence the importance of the dogma of free will.

Finally, we are concrete beings, and all concrete existence involves temporal and spatial limitations. In other words, we are limited parts of an unlimited whole, and we should have a clear conception toward our beyond as to both time and space. As to time, we should know our relation: (1) toward the past, viz., our pre-existence, our indebtedness to former generations, and (2) our post-existence, i. e., our mode of life after death, viz., our immortality in times to come. As to space, we must comprehend our kinship to other sentient beings, especially to our fellow-men.

We do not mean here to enter into further details, especially as we have repeatedly discussed the several problems of God, freedom, immortality, the sonship of man, and the brotherhood of mankind, etc.; and trust that a philosophy of religion such as that outlined here will be needed by our theologians in the measure that

people begin to feel the want of a philosophical and tenable explanation of the true significance of the old dogmas.

There is much objection to theology and even pulpiteers sometimes denounce it. Some would-be reformers imagine that all trouble in the churches comes from theology, from the intrusion of scientific thought into the domain of religious feeling. The truth is the very reverse. We need not less but more theology, and by "theology" I understand simply, the science of religion. We need a radical theology reverent toward the past, respectful in tone, considerate of the faith of others, even if it be erroneous, yet unshrinking and uncompromising as to the essentials of truth. If the present reformation is a reformation of the intellect, rather than the heart, salvation can come alone from the science of religion, from theology.¹

The idea prevails within and without the churches that the liberal thought which is at present invading the study of the Bible, comes from the circles of Freethinkers or infidels. That is a strange error. The scientific interpretation of the Scriptures comes exclusively from theologians. Ingersoll has written the *Mistakes of Moses*, but his criticism of the Pentateuch is on the surface. He really could have made his onslaught on the Scriptures much more formidable, if he had been acquainted with the labors of modern theologians. Avowedly irreligious people sometimes utilise chips from the theological work-shop, but, as a rule, they do not study, they do not search and investigate, they do no plodding. The plodding has been done and is still being done in theological schools, at the seminaries and universities in this country as well as abroad, and especially in Germany. All the so-called "destructive critics" are theologians. With very few exceptions they are professors of theology in good standing; Harnack, who wrote *The History of the Dogma*, Holzmann, our greatest authority on the New Testament,

¹ To characterise the New Theology which to the Old Theology bears the same relation as astronomy bears to astrology, the author proposed the term "Theonomy." See the editorials on "Theology as a Science" in *The Monist*, Vol. XII., No. 4, and Vol. XIII., No. 1. See also the author's articles "God," "Unmateriality of God and Soul," "The Personality of God" in *The Monist*, Vol. IX., No. 2, and "The Personality of God" in *The Open Court*, Vol. XI., No. 10.

De Wet, Kuenen, Wellhausen, Cornill, Delitzsch, Gunkel, and other Old Testament scholars are not only theologians themselves but descendants from theological families, and their very fathers are known as great lights in the orthodox circles of Protestant Christendom.

And there is no frivolity in the destructive side of the higher criticism. Most of our higher critics have reached their conclusions in spite of themselves, in spite of their beliefs, and though the destructive side is perhaps as yet the most assured part of their work, it will prove wholesome in the end. The higher criticism destroys not the Scriptures, not theology, not religion, but only a wrong interpretation of the Scriptures, a narrow conception of theology, the pagan features of religion.

Science is never destructive except of illusions. It does not destroy truth, it destroys error. Its destruction will soon prove to be a mere clearing for a new and better construction, and this is true as well of the higher criticism, as of the philosophical foundation of theology. In place of a narrow belief, we shall have a wider and yet not less definite faith with higher ideals and a broader outlook.

M. Guyau, an unusually gifted thinker, a representative of modern science in France, wrote a book on *The Irreligion of the Future*; but his judgment was limited to a consideration of the situation in his own country. In the clash of party strife he rejected the religion of ecclesiastical dogmatism and espoused the cause of irreligious science. He saw no middle-ground. He was sufficiently familiar with science to know that scientific truth must in the end gain the victory; but he did not understand its religious meaning. Had he listened to its less obvious but not less significant message, he would have appreciated the divinity of science, he would have learned that there is a higher God-conception than the anthropomorphism of dogma and that all truth is holy; and science, the revealer of truth, is the still small voice of divine revelation.

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